



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

UNESCO's Founding Principles



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The denial of human dignity at the heart of "civilization," revealed by World War II, obliged the victors to revise the foundations on which humanity has been constructed. UNESCO was born of this necessity.

Due to their total victory in the "great and terrible war which has now ended," the allies, in the fall of 1945, had three issues to resolve:

- **understand** what had brought humanity so close to the brink ;
- **specify** the value system of the allies which would guide them as they ruled – and judged;
- **define** the content of a possible agreement on the future of, not just the victors (who had differing world views) but of all the peoples of the globe.

UNESCO was thus born of an imperative need. Never before in the history of the world had a total war against a totalitarian enemy resulted in such a total victory. Not only did the world need to be reorganized, as was done with the San Francisco Charter (June 26, 1945) and the Bretton Woods Accords (July 22, 1944), it was all of humanity which had to be recast. Such was the goal of the UNESCO Constitution, adopted by 37 nations, in London, on November 1945, and which, over several decades, has rallied the nearly unanimous support of all the peoples of the earth. Today, UNESCO is the most universal of the international organizations. The Constitution speaks for itself. It is not outdated and its relevance to our times is impressive, proving that the work to which the Organization is dedicated is needed now more than ever. The Constitution is based on a fact which leads to a goal from which the method of achieving it is derived.

THE FACT. The "great and terrible war which has now ended" damaged humanity not only through its actions, though the death and destruction of war but also by its very nature as expressed by the crimes against humanity. Human dignity was trampled, this was the worst effect of the war. The war was able to take such a turn because of a previous "denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men". This led to two results. First, natural and classic disagreements degenerated into a war without mercy and, secondly, ideologies such as "the doctrine of the inequality of men and races" sabotaged elementary respect for human beings and for life itself. Ignorance and prejudice were res-ponsible for allowing such a situation to occur, the Consti-tution asserts.



UNESCO Headquarters, Paris
(D. Roger © UNESCO)

THE GOAL. To prevent the return of a similar catastrophe, ignorance and prejudice must be eradicated. This is not only a prerequisite to preventing a new "great and terrible war," destructive for the human race, it is also necessary for the viable organization of human beings discovering unity in their diversity, after millennia spent in self-ignorance of this diversity and several centuries spent discovering this same diversity through the painful process of a first global unification to combat the impulse of imperialistic drives. A project was needed to uplift humanity and not solely because it is "in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". In fact, says the

The Preparatory Commission

The Commission met in London from November 1-16, 1945, presided by Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education for the United Kingdom. Alfred Zimmern, former Deputy Director of the International Institute on Intellectual Cooperation, was the first Executive Secretary of the Commission. The final objective was "*the creation of an organization for education and culture*". There were 42 countries present: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Columbia, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, El Salvador, Ecuador, France, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, South African Union, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

Constitution, it is "*indispensable to the dignity of man...to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for ... human rights and fundamental freedoms*". The aim is clear and binding. To ignore it is violation of human dignity.

THE METHOD. "*To develop and to increase the means of communication between ... peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives... to secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world... in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern.*" UNESCO is indispensable to achieving "*the purpose of advancing, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of mankind for which the United Nations Organization was established and which its Charter proclaims*". International cooperation to eradicate ignorance and prejudice works on three levels:

- "**Collaborate** in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication;"
- "**Give fresh impulse** to popular education and to the spread of culture;"
- "**Maintain**, increase and diffuse knowledge".

The global result aimed for by UNESCO is founded "*upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind,*" a prerequisite in order to "*secure the*

unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world".

The goals and principals of the Organization are summerized in Article 1 of the Constitution: "*The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations*". In short, the fundamentals rest upon a **goal** ("in order to..."), a **purpose** ("to contribute to..."), a **output** ("promoting collaboration...") and on **action** ("through...").

To find out more

On the UNESCO website (www.unesco.org), click on Organization

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Online archives : <http://http://www.unesco.org/unesda/index.php/eng/accueil/unesda/index.php/e/accueil/>

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The Forerunners

International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC)

created in 1924, in Paris. It is responsible for international intellectual and cultural cooperation. It was issue from the International Commission on Intellectual Cooperation, composed of twelve members including Henri Bergson, Marie Curie and Albert Einstein.

International Bureau of Education

(IBE) was founded in 1925, in Geneva. It acts as a database on educational matters. Originally a non-governmental organization, it soon had financial problems due to lack of resources. In 1929, the IBE became an intergovernmental organization.